WHAT
SHOULD I READ?

Introductory message from Dr. Deb

Students ask this question all the time: what should I read? One of the main purposes for which Equine Studies Institute exists is to foster higher education in horsemanship. In pursuit of that goal, here you will find a list of books from my personal library. I have gathered all these books (and many others that are not listed here) over a long period of years, and you might like to ask ‘how’. The main technique is to haunt used-book stores. Whether you are in your hometown area or whether you’re travelling, they have a tendency to pop up along a roadside. In this Internet era, you can, of course, buy used books cheaply through amazon.com, alibris.com, barnesandnoble.com, Ebay, and so forth; but to make use of these services you have to know ahead of time the title you’re searching for. For myself, I love going in to the actual bookstore….mysterious, crowded little places often stuffed to the ceiling with who knows what wonderful treasures! If you take your time, you’re almost certain to come across something wonderful lurking in a box or on a dusty shelf in a back room. You never know what you might find!

Sometimes, however, I’ve gone after buying specific books. This list will be especially useful to you in making you aware of the fact that certain books exist. When you know ahead of time what you want, certainly you can use online services. However, for specialty equine titles – especially stuff that is older or out-of-print, or for facsimile reprints of “classical” works (or for the well-heeled, the originals), there is no greater help than Robin Bledsoe. If you want to expand your library as well as your knowledge, please sign up to receive Robin’s fabulous catalogs. If you are after a particular old book, Robin can often find it for you if you give her enough time. Contact her by Email: robin.bledsoe@verizon.net, or stop in the shop located in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

I buy all books with the intention of using them. This means I don’t have the same priorities as a “book collector”, who will often want books in near-pristine condition, first editions, original antique works, and copies inscribed by the author. I say this jokingly, but I pride myself on the fact that all of my books are dirty: I don’t own a single clean book. To save money I buy copies that are in reasonably good condition but that might be missing the dust jacket, have a few marks or dogears, fingerprints, scuffed edges, or some wear and tear to the binding. This not only lowers the cost, but proves to me that the book was well-loved before I received it. It is certain that it is going to be appreciated and used once it joins the other volumes in my library.
Onetime Olympic equestrian team captain Bill Steinkraus has said, “in order to be a good rider, you have to be both a rider and a reader.” If you want to learn how to ride well and, especially, how to train your own horse, you have to read – and think. Horsemanship is an ancient art and science, and since 1550 (when printing presses first appeared in Europe) more titles have been published on the subject of horses and horsemanship than on any other subject except the Bible. So there is no question of whether there is “anything” to read.

The problem is, in fact, that there is too much to read. While it’s true, as the old Spanish proverb says, that there is so much to horsemanship that it would take two lifetimes to master it, much of what has been printed about it – especially since World War II, and especially in magazines and in breed-club literature — is sheer rubbish. Thus, another of the functions I try to serve is as a guide to you for how to make the best use of the one lifetime you have. The following list contains books with “quality” content, meaning that they are written by knowledgeable horsemen who produced accomplished, and usually sound and contented, horses; by reputable scholars whose statements are backed up by real research; or by everyday people who are reporting authentic life-changing experiences.

Another old horsemanship adage tells us that for every ten horsemen there are eleven different opinions. No two authors in this list do anything exactly the same way, and yet – very interestingly — one thing that the practice of “quality” horsemanship tends to do is reduce disagreement. Why? Because, for all its apparent diversity – “English” vs. “Western”, “classical” vs. “modern”, “indoor riding” vs. “cross country”, “jumping” vs. “trail riding” – real horsemen have far more similarities than differences. This is because good horsemanship comes from careful observation of horses: what they are really like, rather than what we might want them to be like. The only agenda a real horseman has is understanding horses better. The most important reason for you to delve into the books on this list is that reading will help you enter the ancient and universal stream of horse knowledge and horsemanship skill. The journey is sheer pleasure.

LIST BEGINS ON NEXT PAGE.
PLEASE AVAIL YOURSELF OF THE BOOKMARKED LIST TO LEFT
It allows you to jump quickly to individual sections of this list.
**Books of General Information**

*These books give essential information. Many of them cover a range of basic topics. Most are available for under $50. Every owner/rider should own at least two titles from this section.*


**Mindset**

*Books in this section are all, essentially, indispensable. No one can get very much done with a horse if their horse does not willingly cooperate. Here are people who have discovered how to communicate two-way with animals, or those whose philosophy will help you learn to do so. All exemplify our “….attitude and approach to horsemanship”. Attitude and approach come before any technique.*


Swift, Sally. 1985. *Centered Riding*. St. Martin’s Press, New York, 198 pp. This book is intended to be a “how-to” riding manual, and it does a good job of that – it is one of the most accessible and most clearly illustrated books ever produced. I classify it with the list of “mindset” books, however, because it is really mindset that gives Swift’s book its highest value. See also *Centered Riding 2: Further Explorations* (1995). Trafalgar Square Press, North Pomfret, Vermont, 264 pp.


Wynmalen, Henry. 1979. *Dressage: A Study of the Finer Points of Riding*. Wilshire Books, North Hollywood, California, 287 pp. The primary use for this book comes in the first three chapters, which contain an absolutely beautiful argument for harmony between man and horse. However, be forewarned: Wynmalen equates this with dressage, which is incorrect. Further, you will not want to imitate his training results or riding style; for all the loftiness of Wynmalen’s ideals and the goodness of his intentions, his seat is hard and his horses are stiff.

**Basic Facts of Horse Biology**

This is an area where many owner/riders lack basic knowledge. To ride well, you must realize what kind of an animal a horse actually is, what his needs are, what the limits of his capabilities are. Franz Mairinger’s book is a classic that relates horse biology to training. The Ranger Piece should also be thought-provoking.


**Anatomy and Physiology**

*Books and articles in this section will help you to understand the physical structure of the horse and how the various systems of the body work. This will help you to communicate better with your veterinarian. Also included here is my “Who’s Built Best to Ride: Men or Women” – you should review this to better understand how your own body works in the saddle.*


Biomechanics

Biomechanics means the application of the principles of physics to understanding the movement of living bodies. Biomechanics is the connection between anatomy/structure and performance. Hildebrand’s book is highly recommended, Muybridge’s is historically interesting, and Goubaux and Barrier’s, though old, is still the most complete and correct application to horses.


Muybridge, Eadweard. 1957. Animals in Motion (reprint of part of the original 1887 work). Dover Reprints, New York. 32 pp. text, 183 plates, 4000 individual photographs.


**Tack**

There is always interest in this necessary subject, which is really a branch of applied biomechanics.


**Conformation Study**

This is an old branch of knowledge. Study of the books recommended here will teach you to “….pick horses, not faults.”


Evolution of the Horse

What they taught you about this subject in High School was very likely wrong, or at the very best, too simple. Please read at least two titles from this section.


Living Relatives of the Horse

These are the two best books concerning the asses, half-asses, and zebras that are the horse’s nearest living relatives. “Living” we say: and yet 90% of them are seriously endangered species, clinging by a mere thread to their existence in the wild.


Domestication

How horses came to be domesticated is a topic of continuing fascination to me, for at one time long ago, of course, all horses were wild animals. Pay special attention to Charles Reed, Juliet Clutton-Brock, and Jane Goodall. Zeuner is getting dated but still a valuable read. Download the valuable zoogeographic maps in my paper with Robert Hoffmann – they tell you exactly where the different basic bloodlines of horses have come from.


History of Horse Breeds and Bloodlines

This is another area of great interest. Everyone who stays in horses for any length of time develops preferences, and those who train their own horses develop a kind of connoisseurship. Every horsebreeding nation produces characteristic breeds. This section lists many books that will help you better understand the ‘flavors’ you are picking up on. If you have TB’s or QH’s, Alex Mackay-Smith’s books are indispensable. Margaret Cabell-Self on Morgans has not been bettered. For Arabs, you must read Gladys Brown Edwards. Berger is reliable and nonpolitical on Mustangs. Many breeds are not represented on this list because no careful scholar has attended to them.


Horses in History

You’ll be going time-travelling in this list. Here are the knights in armor, the mysterious and warlike nomads, the ruthless Roman legions, the Spanish and Mexican vaqueros, the mounted Japanese samurai, the American Indians on mounted buffalo-hunts, the ancient Persians. Dive in: all the books here are delicious.


Men-At-Arms Series, Osprey Books, London and New York. Individual titles are not cited here simply because they are too numerous. Every single one of these books is just marvellous. Each is a short (less than 100 page) treatise on a focused topic by a scholar, and backed up with photos of actual artifacts. Titles are presented from every historical era. Each volume contains a set of color plates with detailed ‘reconstruction’ of horses, armor, weapons, fighting style, etc. For extra value, look for volumes illustrated by Angus McBride, the Spedalieres, and Adam Hook. Obtain these books via the online book services – widely available.


“Classical” Riding

Dressage is not classical riding, but rather a horseback game invented in the last quarter of the 19th century that was taken up especially by German military officers, and whose rulebook became codified for use in the modern Olympic games, which began in 1896. Dressage is derivative of classical riding, but so in equal measure are reining and Saddle Seat riding. Classical riding has a far older and wider history than any of the modern riding disciplines. Learn about it by reading the books and articles in this list.


Bennett, D.K. 2005. History of the European Classical High School, with Analysis of the Bitting, Tack, Training Methods, and Breeds of Horse that were Actually Used. The Inner Horseman Vol. 9, nos. 1 and 2.


Downey, Bill. 1975. Tom Bass: Black Horseman. Saddle and Bridle Magazine Press, St. Louis, Missouri, 210 pp. Most “English”-style arena riding in the U.S., up until World War II, represented some form of Baucherism. Tom Bass was probably the single greatest trainer and rider this country ever produced. He trained American Saddlebreds to perform as High School horses – with simply spectacular results.


**Training and Riding**

*Of all the types of “horse books” out there, this is the most common. There are ten million titles, literally, so what is listed here is only what I consider to be the “cream of the crop”. I don’t train horses exactly according to the advice given in any of these books, but I consider it necessary nevertheless to be familiar with them. See annotations that follow a few titles.*


D’Endrody, Agoston (Lt.-Col.). 1959. give *Your Horse a Chance: Three Day Event and Show Jumping*. J.A. Allen, London, 544 pp. This book is very long and rather hard to read; someone jokingly has referred to it as “Give Your Reader a Chance”. Nevertheless the author is attempting to convey useful and humane ideas.
DeRuffieu, François Lemaire. 1986. *Handbook of Riding Essentials: How, When, and Why to use the Seat, Legs, and Hands*. Harper & Row, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 111 pp. This is my no. 1 recommendation if you want a book that sets forth “how” to produce the standard repertoire of exercises, i.e. shoulder-in, leg-yield, half-pass, etc. Very clear drawings, very simple and accessible text.


Grant, Chuck. 1986. *American Dressage*. Privately printed, Brighton, Michigan, 114 pp. Obtain by ordering from: www.shineabit.com. This book and the companion volume, below, are badly-edited transcripts of talks that Grant gave, and they’re pricey. However, they contain the right attitude and needed information.


Young, J.R. 1954, revised 1982. *The Schooling of the Horse*. University of Oklahoma Press, Norman, Oklahoma, 376 pp. (Original title: The Schooling of the Western Horse). I recommend this and the companion volume to all new horse owners. There is some rough stuff in there that I wouldn’t recommend, but Young is a “straight talker,” and so long on common sense and experience, that he really is indispensable.


**Medicine and Health for Rider and Horse (conventional and alternative)**

This section comprises Dr. Deb's idea of “training as treatment”: that the fundamental intention of classical riding (not dressage) is physiotherapeutic, and that it is possible to “ride a horse sound”. This section also includes much sound and readable advice from physicians both conventional and alternative. Some books are primarily directed toward human health, but you will find applicabilities also to your horses.


Parker, Steve. 2007. *The Human Body Book: An Illustrated Guide to Structure, Function, and Disorders*. Includes a DVD presentation. DK Books, New York, 256 pp. This is an excellent place to see clear images of cells, tissue types, circulation, nerves, and all the fine anatomy not visible in gross dissection. The illustrations derive directly from tomographic body scans. Great brief explanation of many disorders. Most of this book is applicable to understanding the horse, too.


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**Poison Plants, Feeding, Pasture Management**


Knight, Anthony P. and Richard G. Walter. 2001. *A Guide to Plant Poisoning of Animals in North America*. Teton NewMedia, Jackson, Wyoming, 367 pp. Note: don’t figure this book is useful only if you live in North America. 90% of grasses and toxic plants are found worldwide. This is a very useful book which your veterinarian should know about.


Reference

*Ellen Wells’ book is an indispensable, very complete bibliography of important horse works published up through 1974. So – if you want to know even more books to read, look here!*